

Minutes of the Open Forum Monday January 15th at 7.30pm
At Suffolk Road Church, Sudbury.

The Forum was attended by 28 people from 15 churches.

1. Welcome & Opening Worship - Andrew Dixey

Andrew welcomed everyone to Suffolk Road and gave some historical background to the church, now an independent congregation, but formerly Brethren. He spoke about how the congregation were seeking God's will in prayer and the prayer had been 'Bring people in'. The fellowship has been blessed by newcomers through a variety of events, each of whom have brought their own insights and gifts.

Andrew then read from Ephesians 3 and led the meeting in prayer.

2. Apologies: Gerry Higginson, Gill Phillips, Pat and David Ford, Sue Kistruck.

3. Revd Lee Batson - Ecumenism in the 21st Century

The chairman welcomed Lee, Vicar of Epping and former Ecumenical Officer in the Chelmsford diocese.

Lee introduced himself and then spoke about how ecumenism is viewed and the context in which ecumenical dialogue takes place today. He stated that conversations happen both within and across traditions and pointed out how far ecumenism has moved in the last 50 years, saying that it is important to celebrate what is already being done ecumenically.

In ecumenical dialogue the most quoted piece of scripture is Jesus' prayer in John 17 "May they be one as we are one", but are we one church? How do we answer Jesus' prayer? Do we need to own that we are all tribal in order to be able to move forward?

The modern ecumenical movement began in the field of foreign mission as churches came together to seek to be an effective witness overseas. The World Council of Churches held its first meeting in 1910 on this theme. It seems that when mission is the focus our divisions become less important...

When ecumenism works well it is about more than the opportunity to wash up in one another's kitchens. There is a definite outward focus and examples of this include Town Pastors and foodbanks.

What is mission? The Church of England answers this question with five marks or pointers; proclamation, nurture, challenge, safeguarding, service.

However is there a danger that by focusing on mission we are led to pretend that we are more united than we really are, does missional activity work well until we stop to ask what we are really trying to achieve?

Often when it comes to ecumenical dialogue we will seek the lowest common denominator and fudge doctrinal issues because we are scared of conflict, even in love. It seems that either we insist on our own way or we create something that pleases no one.

Perhaps if we look at ecumenical relationships in a new way we might take an alternative text as our starting point: 1 Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

This text acknowledges the incomplete nature of faith, that none of us have got things completely right and none of us have the full story. This gives us the permission to say "I'm a Christian, I worship at ___ and this is why..." We can then enter into dialogue, not worrying about what we have to give, but being open to what we can receive from others.

Lee spoke about worship in the Cambridge Theological Federation where, at its best, each college was able to offer worship authentic to its own tradition for others to enjoy. Could this be replicated locally?

If we adopt this approach to ecumenism we:

- Become less concerned about what 'being one' might look like
- Become more concerned about being receptive to others
- Recognise that we are on a journey, but we don't know what the Promised Land looks like yet!

One acid test of this would be whether we are willing to recommend other churches to visitors who attend our own. "The song of the lark and the song of the nightingale are very different and we all like different sounds".

In response to questions Lee suggested that the concern in drawing in 18s-35s, whilst church wide, was also a cultural issue and had to do with belonging. Other organisations also struggle with this and the Church can become too tied up with trying to appeal to young people. Each church and each Christian needs to find their own gift/charism and stick to it.

It was also noted that the word ecumenism itself is 'churchy' and unhelpful, better to create a framework and get on and do the work without the jargon.

Lee was thanked for his presentation.

4. Minutes of Forum held on 7th December 2017

Signed as a correct record.

5. Matters arising from those Minutes

None

6. Treasurer's Report

There has been no change in the financial position since 7th December. The treasurer reminded churches that their affiliation donations are now due.

7. Chairman's Business

- The Chairman reminded people about the services to be held for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and encouraged as many as possible to attend, especially the service on 21st January at which David Cornick, Secretary for Churches Together in England, will be speaking.

- Prayers were asked for Ken and Christine Steel who are unwell and for Kettle and Fish which recommences on Thursday 18th January.

- Eleanor Ridge has produced a new 'Time to Pray' leaflet and people were encouraged to use this.

- Town Pastors are looking for volunteers to go out in teams and to staff the prayer base. Anyone interested should contact Frank Marsden.

8. News and updates

Thanks were given to all who helped with the Christmas Tree festival, which raised a total of £3500.

The RAMble around Sudbury went well, 50 sheep were handed out and positive feedback was received from shops and families.

It is hoped that we will hold some form of community engagement to mark Ash Wednesday.

Adrian Plass will be speaking at Sudbury Baptist Church on 24th April 2018, please publicise.

There will be a Pentecost Praise service at St Peter's on 20th May. Gavin Calver will preach.

WATCH - there are plans to sell the land adjacent to the health centre and CTiSD need a representative to attend discussions on this. Anyone interested please speak to a member of Steering Group.

9. Your views

Malcolm Hill shared a document on the subject of peacemaking and encouraged all churches to discuss the issue of peacemaking and to share it in schools and the local community. Copies of the document are available on request.

Teachers are needed in the Lebanon, if you know anyone who might be interested contact Roger Pullan.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Closing Prayer

12. Date of next meeting: Thursday 26th April 2018 at The Vineyard Centre, Tudor Road, Sudbury.